



Fathead Minnows In New Ponds and Lakes



Fathead minnows are often stocked in new ponds and lakes as a forage fish. If this is done before stocking the impoundment with a typical bass-bluegill-channel catfish combination an immediate nutrient base for the sportfish population is ensured. .

Although the bass-bluegill-channel catfish combination will usually do well on its own, minnow stocking helps ensure that the fish population gets off to a good start. It will provide the newly introduced bass with a food source as soon as they are large enough to capture it.

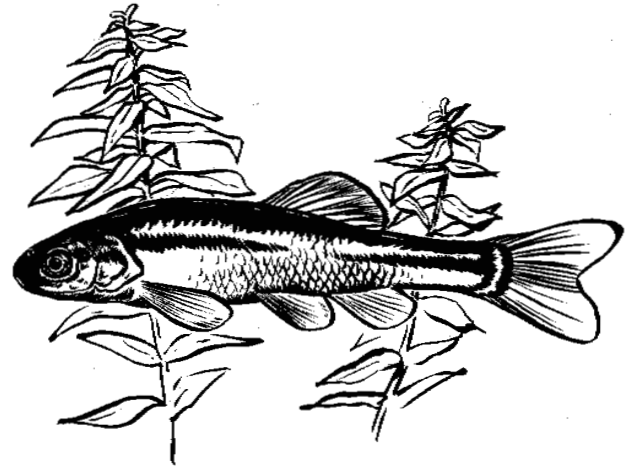
Description

The fathead minnow is principally a river species, common to the Prairie Region of Missouri. Its diet consists mainly of algae and other plant material, but it also consumes aquatic insects. Fathead minnows are easy to propagate and are hardy in a bait bucket, making them one of the most commonly used bait minnows in North America.

Many anglers call these minnows blackhead minnows, because during the spawning season breeding males assume a very dark color about the head and may have dark vertical bands on the body. The males also develop pointed knobs on their snouts and chins called tubercles. These are used both to butt unwelcome visitors from their territory and to clean the surface of the nest.

Fathead minnows make ideal forage fish, because even adult fish are small enough (adults reach only 1.5-3.5 inches) to be eaten by juvenile predator fish.

Under terms of the Missouri Conservation Department's Pond Stocking Program, minnows are the only fish permitted in a body of water prior to the stocking of fingerling largemouth bass, bluegill, and channel catfish.



Stocking Rate and Procedure

Fathead minnows should be stocked at a rate of .5 to 1 pound of fish per surface acre. Hauling and handling instructions can be obtained from vendors of the fish.

To maximize their value as forage in new ponds and lakes, fatheads should be stocked one growing season (May-Sept.) before bass are introduced. This gives the minnows a chance to reproduce before the introduction of their main predator.

For example, if you were enrolled in the Conservation Department's Pond Stocking Program, you would receive fingerling bluegill and channel catfish in the fall of the year, and fingerling largemouth bass the following June. In this case, it would be best to stock fatheads sometime during the spring or summer of the year you receive your bluegill and catfish. Although this stocking sequence offers the best results, some benefit can be achieved by stocking the minnows anytime before or even simultaneously with the bass fingerlings.

Stocking minnows in ponds that already contain

established fish populations is not generally recommended as an answer to a slow-growing fish population. The minnows would likely be eaten by resident fish immediately after stocking, and thus would serve only as short-lived, expensive fish food.

Spawning

If fathead minnows are stocked before other fish are introduced, their spawning success depends on three factors:

1. The availability of appropriate spawning habitat.
2. The timing of the stocking.
3. The ratio of males to females.

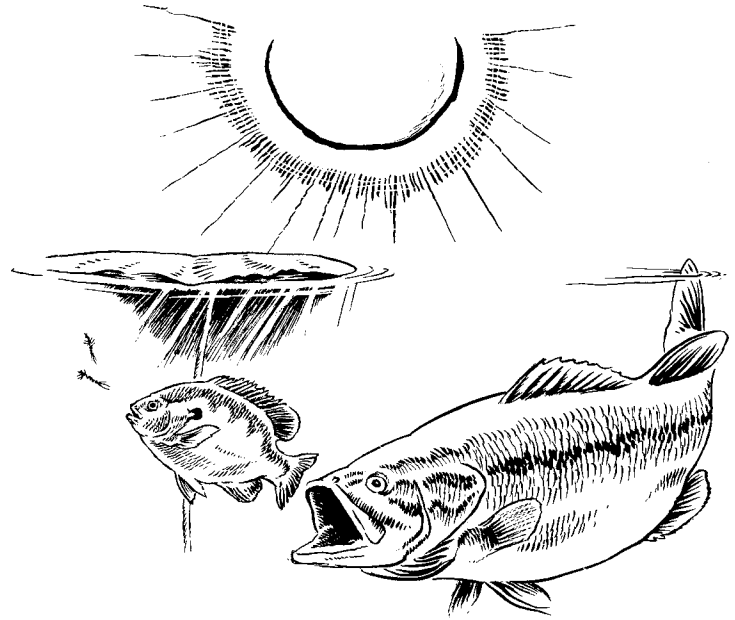
Fathead minnow males prepare a nest site by cleaning the undersurface of rocks, twigs, and boards or tile. These submerged objects are where female fatheads will deposit their eggs. Males remain with the eggs until they hatch.

If you wish, you can improve spawning success by providing the minnows with good nesting habitat, such as cedar shingles. These shingles should be driven into the pond bank at intervals of approximately 2 to 3 feet and should be installed no deeper than 1.5 feet beneath the water's surface at a 45 degree angle in relation to the pond's bottom.

In Missouri, spawning usually occurs from the second week in May to early August.

To achieve a suitable ratio of males to females, make sure that the minnows stocked vary in size. Fathead males are larger than females, so stocking mostly large minnows could result in poor spawning success.

Mortality of fathead minnows is high and the maximum life span for the species seems to be three summers. However, when predatory fish such as bluegill and largemouth bass are stocked, most minnows will be eaten within 2-3 years.



Sources

You can often buy fathead minnows through local feed and grain stores, during spring "fish day" programs, or through bait dealers. You can also purchase these minnows directly from commercial fish hatcheries.

A common price for fathead minnows in Missouri during March 1999 was \$35.00 for 1000 minnows. The Conservation Department does not distribute or sell fathead minnows, but can provide a list of commercial fish hatcheries offering them.

Send your request to:

Missouri Fish Dealers List, Division of Fisheries
Missouri Department of Conservation
Box 180
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180.

E-Mail:

www.conservation.state.mo.us

telephone:

573/751-4115